



Friends of the Louisiana Whooping Cranes

Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries
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Since You Last Read...an Update on the 2011, 2012, and 2013 Louisiana Whooping Cranes

As you may recall from the last newsletter, we reported that the non-viable eggs from L7 & 8-11 were collected at the end of April after they failed to hatch. Upon examination the eggs were determined to have been infertile which was not surprising given the young age of the birds. What was surprising was that just 19 days later the pair renested and were seen incubating a new egg with a second egg confirmed several days later. Whooping cranes can and will renest if their nest is destroyed or if their eggs fail to hatch but they are more likely to do this if they lose their nest/eggs early in the incubation period. Since this pair had incubated full term, actually an extra week, we weren't expecting them to try again this year.



Doing an excellent job incubating eggs...either crane 7-11 or 8-11. The bands were not visible, so unable to determine if it is mom or dad's shift. Photo taken May 2014.

As with the first nest, they proved themselves to be excellent incubators but once again the hatch dates for the eggs came and went without any sign of chicks, so the eggs were collected and again determined to be infertile. While we were disappointed to not have chicks hatch this year the pair gained valuable experience and we gained a lot of information through our observations during both of these nesting attempts. We are incredibly grateful to the landowner and farmer who allowed us access to monitor the birds and who helped provide information about exactly when the nests were built and when the eggs were laid. We are looking forward to next year when hopefully, as older birds with more experience, this pair will produce fertile eggs and hatch a chick. Additionally, we will be monitoring and hope to see nesting behavior and possibly eggs from 2-4 other pairs that have or are beginning to form and will be old enough to breed.

As the nesting season winds down we start monitoring birds for molt. Whooping cranes undergo a synchronous molt which means they replace all their flight feathers at one time, leaving them flightless and more vulnerable to predators for ~6 weeks as the new feathers grow in. Whooping cranes will generally undergo this molt for the first time as a two or three year old and then repeat the process every second or third year after that. The birds often become more shy and secretive while they are molting and as a result there was not a lot of data on this process prior to reintroduction projects where birds are monitored more intensely and are often in habitats that are more accessible for making observations. We first documented molt last year when we were able to confirm that seven of our 2 year-old birds

Since You Last Read...an Update on the 2011, 2012, and 2013 Louisiana Whooping Cranes cont.

molted. This year our focus was on the 2012 birds who would be two years of age and the three year old birds who hadn't molted last year. We documented four birds molting this spring – two birds from the 2012 cohort and two birds from the 2011 cohort. L5-11, the three year-old male who had joined the 2013 cohort at the release pen was one of the 2011 birds who molted but sadly he was killed by a predator, likely coyotes, while he was flightless and unable to escape. L5-11 will be missed but we are glad he was able to serve as a role model for the 2013 cohort as they adjusted to living on their own in the wild. Fortunately, the other birds remained safe throughout their molt and are all able to fly once again.

Finally, we once again have Louisiana cranes visiting Texas. Last year seven members of the 2012 cohort, in two separate groups, traveled all the way up to areas around Dallas and ended up spending ~6 months there before returning to Louisiana in the fall. One bird, L3-12, stuck a power-line and died shortly after returning but the rest survived and seemed to have settled down in good locations over the winter. As spring arrived the birds moved around a bit, with most coming to White Lake before four of them in three separate groups headed to Texas once again. L5-12 went right back to where she was last summer and was spotted by the observant landowner who helped monitor her last year, before we even had a chance to contact her and let her know the bird was back. The other birds have also returned close to where they spent time last year, with L6-12 recently returning to the same ranch where she was last summer after having moved around the area for several weeks. We may still be a bit puzzled about why these birds returned to Texas this spring but we're much more confident this year, that the birds are picking good and safe areas and that like last year they'll return to Louisiana in the fall.



As of this publication the Louisiana whooping cranes are reported in Avoyelles, Evangeline, Jefferson Davis, Vermilion, Cameron, Calcasieu, Acadia, and Beauregard Parishes as well as the state of Texas.

Tallest goes first.....female 14-11 heads up a line of birds that includes Great and Snowy Egrets. What a wonderful photo that demonstrates the difference in size between the various species. This photo was submitted by Dan Womack of Lafayette. Thanks Dan for the use of the wonderful photo and for being a friend of the Louisiana cranes.

April-June 2014 Friends of the Cranes

A special thanks to our monetary donors, without whom this project would not be possible. The following individuals have made monetary donations to support the reintroduction of whooping cranes to southwest Louisiana.

Jennifer Mixon, Sara Simmonds, Caroline Winter, Gay Gomez, Ellen Reintjes and Don Tatzin, Cactus Clyde Productions, S. Richard, W. Phenice, Coastal Club, HDR Engineering, Inc. and Chevron.



Also a **very special thanks** to **Kell McInnis and the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Foundation** for administering the distribution of our donated/awarded whooping crane funds. If you or someone you know would like to make a donation in support of the cranes, you can contact Kell at 225-765-5100, kmcinnis@wlf.la.gov, or visit the Foundation's website directly at <http://lawff.org/>.

Donations can also be mailed directly to the Foundation at P.O. Box 80378 Baton Rouge, LA 70898-0378

LDWF Receives Third Grant From Chevron for Whooping Crane Awareness In Louisiana



We would like to recognize Chevron for their continued support of the whooping crane reintroduction program. Thanks to their sponsorship, LDWF has been successful in producing a wide-spread public awareness campaign that reaches the general public through a variety of methods (billboards, radio and tv ads). Additionally we continue to host quality workshops for educators across the state. We believe awareness of the reintroduction project leads to appreciation of the cranes, which leads to protection of the species and hopefully results in a successful and self-sustaining population. Chevron's partnership is critical in this endeavor and we are proud and grateful to work with them on this project.

Louisiana Whooping Crane Survival as of July 2014:

A total of 50 birds have been released in Louisiana since the project began in 2010. Out of those 50 birds, a total of 29 individuals are currently alive for a survivorship of 58%. Beginning with the 2011 cohort, birds received for the Louisiana project were younger in age compared to those received in the 2010 cohort. LDWF strongly believes that has helped increase the survival percentage of the individual cohorts. Reported below are the survival rates for the 2011-2013 cohorts.

Cohort Year:	2011	2012	2013	3 Year Average:
Current Survival:	10/16= 63%	10/14= 71%	9/10=90%	29/40= 73%

Louisiana Whooping Crane Public Awareness Efforts Having an Impact

The most visible whooping crane public awareness message can be seen daily by thousands of drivers and passengers traversing major Louisiana thoroughfares such as I-10, I-12, I-20, I-49 and US Hwy 90. Funded by a grant from Chevron and expanded by the generous support of Lamar Advertising, the “Protect Whooping Cranes” message is visible on billboards in Alexandria, Hammond, Houma, Lake Charles, Lafayette and Shreveport.

Lamar generously provides the board space where they have unsold inventory and LDWF only has to pay for the vinyl signs. If a board with the whooping

crane bulletin is sold to a client, Lamar will move the vinyl sign to another available location, if the vinyl has not become overly worn. The signs range in size from 12 x 48 feet to 10 x 36 feet, and most are illuminated for nighttime visibility. Nine new vinyls were installed in July in the six markets mentioned above.

A recently completed hunter survey, conducted by LDWF’s Wildlife Division, indicates hunters are getting the message. The survey was sent to six percent of randomly selected resident hunters who purchased licenses in the 2013-14 hunting season. Of the 17,242 hunters surveyed 3,348 responded, equivalent to 22 percent. Two questions relating to the whooping crane project were included in the survey and the results are below:

1. Are you aware that LDWF, along with Federal partners, is releasing Whooping Cranes back into Louisiana as part of a re-population project?

*** 55 percent of respondents said YES**

2. Are you in support of releasing Whooping Cranes back into Louisiana?

*** 95 percent of respondents said YES**

Breaking down the responses more precisely into those individuals who indicated they were aware that cranes were being released and those that were not aware that cranes were being released:

*** Of those who responded that they were aware that cranes were being released in Louisiana 98, percent indicated that they support the releases**

*** Of those who were NOT aware that cranes were being released in Louisiana, 92 percent indicated that they support the releases**

This news is very encouraging and underscores the value of getting the “Protect Whooping Cranes” message out to the public. We will continue to work with our corporate sponsors to spread this message and further enhance whooping crane survival rates, relative to human interaction, in the years ahead.

